

Assessing The Validity Of The Teacher Perceiver Interview As A Predictor Of Faculty Performance

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Abstract

The Teacher Perceiver Interview (TPI), developed by SRI/Gallup researchers, has been used by over 1000 secondary school districts to identify strengths specific to effective teachers. College administrators have traditionally relied on resumes, letters of recommendation, transcripts and on-campus interviews with no assurance that this process will properly identify a successful classroom teacher. Could the TPI serve as a valid assessment instrument to supplement current hiring processes and provide a quantitative prediction of classroom instructional success while screening out applicants who might not perform to minimum standards? This research correlates TPI scores with other assessment measures to validate the TPI as a predictor of faculty performance.

1. Introduction

College administrators involved in the hiring of new faculty would probably agree that the traditional process of reviewing resumes, letters of recommendation, and transcripts along with on-campus interviews are no guarantee that the individual hired will be a successful teacher. It is even more certain that the process of hiring a replacement is costly, time-consuming, and disruptive. Ideally institutions would prefer to hire competent, caring, committed, and well suited faculty in the first place but the hiring process is inherently risky. It would be desirable to employ a validated assessment instrument to quantify effective, successful teacher characteristics. Such a tool would supplement the standard hiring techniques and be invaluable in identifying applicants that would perform in the classroom as expected and screen out applicants who would not perform to minimum standards.

2. The Teacher Perceiver Interview (TPI)

In an attempt to maximize the chance of selecting the right instructor, over one thousand secondary school districts have used an instrument called the Teacher Perceiver Interview (TPI) developed during the 1960's by Selective Research International/Gallup to identify strengths specific to effective teachers. The TPI is a structured personal interview which looks for life themes-patterns in a person's life – which parallel the habits and behavioral patterns found in the most successful teachers.

The SRI/Gallup researchers interviewed parents, administrators, students, and fellow teachers looking for the qualities in those they named not just “good” teachers, but the “best” teachers. The SRI/Gallup researchers identified 12 “best” teacher themes including three Intrapersonal, four Interpersonal, and five Extrapersonal Themes. The Themes are defined as spontaneous, recurring patterns of thought, feeling and behavior, which point the way to valuable talent. Trained, certified, interviewers “look for” these themes in a structured approximately 30-minute interview.

2.1. Intrapersonal Theme

- **Mission:** The teacher sees education as the foundation for future life and wants to help children grow to improve society.
- **Investment:** The teacher's satisfaction in teaching is derived from the success of the students, and he or she is concerned when students do not succeed.
- **Focus:** The teacher has personal role models and goals that direct him/her in a purposeful direction professionally, and he/she sees teaching as a life long career.

2.2. Interpersonal Theme

- **Empathy:** The teacher understands and accepts a student's emotions and is able to perceive and respond directly to a child's immediate emotions.
- **Rapport Drive:** This teacher sees him/herself as a friendly person whom the students like. This teacher works to build strong mutual relationships with students and views this relationship as an essential part of the learning process.
- **Listening:** The teacher sees listening as a way to help others talk and believes the answer to a problem lies within the speaker.
- **Objectivity:** The teacher responds to the total situation and gets all information before responding.

2.3. Extrapersonal Theme

- **Individual Perception:** The teacher gets to know the needs and interests of each child and builds an individualized learning program based on this knowledge. The teacher provides a variety of activities in order for each student to express his/her creativity.
- **Input Drive:** The teacher is excited about his/her own learning and uses new acquired ideas to help others. This teacher is constantly seeking materials and knowledge from the outside to bring into the classroom.
- **Activation:** The teacher sees student successes as a key in helping students learn and knows and uses many ways to get students interested in the learning process.
- **Innovation:** The teacher is constantly looking for, or trying, new or different approaches to learning. The teacher assists students in the development of their creativity in order for the students to become actively involved in the classroom.
- **Gestalt:** The teacher is well organized with a drive toward completion, albeit a perfectionist. The teacher helps students develop a need for closure but does so by working from the students' level. (Ryan and Alcock, 2002).

What is interesting to note is that the TPI was developed primarily for use in hiring teachers for secondary education. Yet similar qualities are desired in almost any group of people responsible for imparting knowledge to receptive learners.

3. Views Regarding TPI Use

The importance of the interview is underlined in Catalyst, The Journal of the Nebraska Council of School Administrators. The author argues that personnel administrators should utilize a particular type of interview—one that is highly structured and minimizes stress (like the Teacher Perceiver Interview). As discussed, the structured interview consists of three types of questions: situational (in which interviewees are asked to respond to a hypothetical situation), observational (in which the interviewee is asked to reflect and comment on the actions of a third party), and personal (in which the candidate is asked to articulate his or her personal beliefs). It is further argued that the structured interview process is reliable, objective, valid, and provides in-depth understanding. The author cautions against using the structured interview as the lone means of making hiring decisions, using it in a non-humanistic manner, and allowing its use by untrained interviewers.

Gallup has great confidence in the Perceiver, a confidence that is based on

...a strong belief that consistently recurring patterns of thought, feeling, and behavior are identifiable and measurable within individuals. These patterns (themes) remain fairly consistent over the course of one's life and, when accompanied with the correct stimulus, provide a higher potential to achieve excellence. The underlying philosophy, then, involves focusing on, and studying, patterns of excellence within talented people (SRI Gallup, 1990,p.1)

The developers of the Teacher Perceiver Interview continue, noting that

It has been clearly documented at SRI Gallup that, when objectively interviewed, successful individuals within specific positions (when asked the appropriate questions), respond differently than do less successful individuals; thus, there is a belief in finding and selecting the successful (talented) people and placing them into positions where they can utilize their talents maximally, resulting in greater efficiency and productivity within an organization. (SRI Gallup, 1990, pp. 1-2)

The Gallup Organization claims that the Teacher Perceiver Interview will aid in identifying the most promising candidates and allow the elimination of others from consideration. Interviewees who receive low scores on the perceiver, according to Gallup, do not possess the qualities (or talent) necessary to be good teachers. Those with higher scores do have the necessary qualities to succeed as teachers and will perform accordingly.

4. Studies Of TPI Application

Although the instrument was developed during the 1970's, commanded a national audience by the early 1980's and is in widespread use by secondary schools, little evidence exists of the instrument's use by institutions of higher learning. Teacher education programs which require assessment of candidates' personal/interpersonal attributes for admittance and continuance in their programs have positive long-term impacts on the profession and the education of children. Similarly institutions of higher education have a responsibility to employ instructors with the befitting personal/interpersonal attributes that will cause them to be effective and satisfied, and remain in the profession. (Danielson & McGreal, 2000).

A study by Shellig (1975) examined the relationship between the Teacher Perceiver and Teacher performance ratings. The sample for this study consisted of eighty teachers—some of whom were hired using the Teacher Perceiver (the “Experimental group”) and others hired without use of the Perceiver (the “control group”)—who were rated by students and supervisors. In this unpublished doctoral dissertation, researcher Edward J. Shellig reached the following conclusions: 1) There was no significant difference in teacher performance between these two groups of teachers (i.e. those hired using the TPI and those hired without using the TPI) when rated by students; 2) There was no significant difference in teacher performance between the Experimental group and the Control group when rated by supervisors; 3) There was no significant correlation between the scores teachers received on the Perceiver and teacher performance when rated by students; 4) There was no significant correlation between the scores teachers received on the Perceiver and teacher performance when rated by supervisors; 5) There was a significant correlation between the way students rated teacher performance and the way supervisors rated teacher performance.

In January of 1990, SRI Gallup issued a Concurrent Validity Study, the purpose of which was to “provide an updated piece of evidence to be considered in evaluating the efficacy of the interview and selection process”. The 1990 study states plainly that the Teacher Perceiver Interview will, if valid, “measure the relationship between talent in an individual and the subsequent performance of that individual upon being hired”. This study sample included 173 teachers from both public and private schools. School administrators were asked to provide quartile ratings, ranking their teachers as being in the first, second, third or fourth quartiles when compared to all the teachers the administrator had come across in terms of teaching talent. Interestingly, of the 162 teachers who were actually rated, 131 (80.9%) were placed in the top two quartiles! Only 31 were placed in the lower two. This study concludes that the TPI scores do correlate with administrator quartile ratings and that scores were not impacted in any systematic way by gender, ethnicity, or teaching experience.

The most recent study of the TPI was presented in April of 1994. The study provides up-dated evidence on the efficacy of the Gallup/SRI Teacher Perceiver and included a sample of 211 teachers from a variety of educational settings. For 146 teachers, this study also utilized quartile rating made by administrators. For 36 teachers, a 31-item survey was given to students who were asked to rate their teachers on a Likert scale of 1 to 5. This study concludes that (as did the 1990 study) the total score on the TPI was found to correlate to the quartile ratings made by administrators. Student ratings also correlated with TPI scores, but only with two of the twelve themes. Interestingly, this study suggests that TPI scores not be the sole determinant in making hiring decisions and calls for the collection of data for research in all school districts in which the TPI is used so that results can be validated for the specific district.

5. A Leading University's Use Of The TPI

Intent on maintaining its leading edge in educational practices, the Colorado campus of the largest private educational institution in the U.S. has used the TPI for several years as part of the screening process for hiring instructors to teach in its unique classroom environment. Using an experienced, trained educator, the twenty-two-question version of the Perceiver has been administered to every applicant. It should be noted that the Perceiver has not been considered a stand-alone instrument and that the Perceiver was used along with other criteria as part of an over-all hiring assessment. However, those who scored on the low end (5 to 6 and below out of 22) were summarily eliminated from further consideration. If assessment of an applicant's score was high (17 or 18 and above on a rating scale of 22), the applicant was regarded as a "can't miss" instructor. Those in the middle group were occasionally advanced to the next step in the assessment process if there were extenuating or compelling considerations such as where there exists an acute shortage of instructors in specific courses/disciplines like Astronomy or CTT computer programming.

The assessment process, in brief, begins with the Perceiver interview being administered either in person or by phone. If the score is sufficient for further consideration, the applicant then is invited to attend an assessment consisting of a 20-minute lecture given by the applicant to a group of applicants and existing faculty, a small group exercise, another brief interview, and a evaluation of a written paper.

Although the hiring process outlined has been in use for many years, only recently have questions been raised as to the validity of the TPI in the faculty screening process since the TPI is used in the initial determination of candidate acceptance for further screening, is there any evidence that the applicant's score on the TPI correlates to any other quantifiable measures of success in other stages of the assessment process or in the classroom?

To validate the practical applicability of the TPI, scores from the TPI were correlated to selected questions from Student End-of-Course Surveys (SECOS) and to the average score received on the classroom presentation, small group exercise, and record interview. The SECOS questions used were as follow:

1. Instructor presented the curriculum at an appropriate pace?
2. Instructor was well-organized and managed the course effectively?
3. Instructor exhibited a professional relationship with students?

6. Results

Using various sample groups of hired faculty (sample size also varied), the individual TPI scores were correlated to the scores received on the three End-of-course survey questions listed previously. The TPI scores, ranging from 8 to 21, resulted in relatively weak coefficients of correlation:


1. Instructor presented the curriculum at an appropriate pace $r = 0.18$
2. Instructor was well organized and managed the course effectively $r = 0.18$
3. Instructor exhibited a professional relationship with students $r = 0.01$

When the individual TPI scores were correlated to the scores given by faculty assessors, the results were:

1. 20 minute facilitation type presentation $r = 0.10$
2. Small group working together exercise $r = 0.26$
3. Faculty member record interview $r = 0.20$

Undoubtedly there are confounding variables to consider in evaluating the significance of the correlations. The nature of the course being taught, the level of the course, class demographics, and positioning of a course in the curriculum could all affect student responses to the End-of-course surveys. Similarly the scores of faculty assessors could be influenced by the assessment experience and training of faculty, structure of the instruments used for assessing faculty applicants, and assessor biases.

While the literature would herald the usefulness of the TPI as an additional, and perhaps valid, predictor of instructor success in the classroom, there should not be a rush to judgment for rejection of the TPI. There is currently no data to indicate that an applicant with a low score could or would not be successful facilitating instructions to college students. Many who choose to teach in higher education have had no prior teaching experience yet with training and observation of experienced faculty, they can hone their skills and behavior to a highly effective level.

The relationship of faculty applicant pre-assessment to the assessment of student learning is logical in its sequencing. Why devote considerable costs, energy, and measures to assessing an end product be it student learning or programs without first assessing the quality of the raw materials-in this case the instructor ability to perform in the classroom? 

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